



# Introduction to the Handbook: Navigating the Complex and Dynamic Landscape of Participatory Research and Inquiry

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The world is quite different today than it was almost four years ago, when we started working on the handbook you have in your hands. Even then there was an urgency to offer a knowledge source that would articulate a comprehensive exposition of different participatory research methods specifically oriented to support processes of social transformation. Today the urgency seems even greater.

We are bringing this book to completion at a time of global upheaval. The social disruptions and the suffering of millions of persons during the COVID-19 pandemic represent only one of several traumatic realities within which this handbook comes to fruition. Add to it the emergence of populism with its denial and distortion of truth; the ideological shift to the right in many countries in the global North and South, with the accompanying wave of political turmoil and resistance from below; the increased recurrence of natural disasters – fires, hurricanes, thawing poles and heightened sea levels – associated with

climate change; the exponential growth and use of digital technology with the consequent spectre of cyber-insecurity, and the increased levels of inequality and exclusion.

These, among others, are the realities humanity faces today, within which participatory processes in general, and participatory research processes in particular, emerge and must be understood. We will return to the existential dilemmas implied for participatory research and inquiry in Chapters 2 and 71. Suffice it to say here that we view participatory research and inquiry as meaningful instruments that serve two critical purposes: on the one hand, they promote participation and engagement of those who experience the social problems studied and who often represent excluded and historically marginalized communities; and on the other hand, they can develop actionable knowledge and praxis to foster and support broader groups, communities and social movements engaged in social change processes that aspire to materialize an inclusive and just society.

We are thus pleased to present this *Handbook of Participatory Research and Inquiry*. The handbook aims to articulate a wide range of pioneering and cutting-edge perspectives, as well as some innovative mainstream approaches, methods and techniques – in other words, what we see as the state of the art at the current time. Developed over the past decades, these perspectives and approaches reflect the work of a community of researchers, professionals and activists engaged in research that is both participatory and intrinsically linked to interventions and action for social transformation.

Section 1 of the handbook consists of two introductory chapters. This first one offers a map of what you will find in the two volumes of the handbook. We introduce here the landscape of participatory research from a bird's eye perspective, and explain the rationale used to construct the handbook's structure and to curate the chapter contributions. In Chapter 2 we go deeper into what we consider important conversations taking place in this landscape, exploring and elaborating on three challenges presently confronted by the practice of participatory research. At the end of the handbook, in Chapter 71, we return to these, elaborating on what we learned from the handbook contributions, and suggesting some implications for where we go from here.

In these first introductory chapters we also articulate and make transparent our own positions as editors vis-a-vis the concepts and debates around participatory research and inquiry. Since this is a very diverse and contested landscape, we hope that making clear where we are coming from will help the reader better navigate the chapters and the logic of their inclusion in one of the five handbook sections.

## **THE HANDBOOK'S PURPOSE AND RATIONALE**

The purpose of this handbook is to provide the reader with a resource to explore in detail

how to design robust participatory research and inquiry, and how to use its methods effectively. Our aim is to give a clear exposition of concepts and methods and an exploration of practice dilemmas in such a way as to enable readers to actually use them.

Our own research and teaching over several decades have helped us to identify a 'gap' which we intend this book to fill. That is, a resource which offers the reader access to both the conceptual foundations of participatory research, and a comprehensive 'how to' guide. We have therefore sought to compile a handbook that includes both the deeper political and ethical questions of participatory research, and gives facilitators enough detail to try out any of the featured methods. We also needed to reflect the explosion of methodological innovation over the past 20 years, and the methodological possibilities opened up by the widening availability of new technologies and the shortening of the distance among participatory research practitioners around the world. The development of knowledge in other fields has also opened up new avenues for participatory research. One example is intersectionality and its implications for inclusive participatory practice. Another is systems thinking and complexity theory, which have matured to give us a better understanding of the nature of social change, and can inform our action-oriented participatory methodologies.

Volume 1 offers a conceptual map of the PR landscape, including discussions of where the practice is today (Section 1), the current issues and debates characterizing it (Section 2, edited by Ospina) and its foundations and key influences (Section 3, edited by Howard and Burns). It then introduces the first two subsections of Section 4 of the handbook (4.1 edited by de Santibañes; 4.2 edited by Roberts), which feature specific methods and tools that have been developed and used successfully over the years. Chapters in this section, starting in Volume 1 and continuing into Volume 2, include a step-by-step description of the featured method or tool

and an exemplar of how and in what context it was used (4.3 edited by Ortiz Aragón and Brydon-Miller; 4.4 edited by Lewin and Shaw; 4.5 edited by Apgar and Allen; and 4.6 edited by Oosterhoff).

Our aspiration is that both new and experienced researchers interested in a particular application of PR can choose chapters from Section 4 in the handbook and, upon locating what they search for, retrieve very practical (conceptually framed) advice to implement the method or tool on their own. To make the best use of this how-to, step-by-step resource, readers can draw on Sections 1–3 to understand key conversations and debates around core issues, as well as influences and foundations that support today's participatory research practice. They will also find in both volumes important critiques and departures from tradition that reflect a dynamic community of practitioners recurrently innovating. The specifics of this structure will be described towards the end of this chapter, once we have shared the philosophical, conceptual and practical groundings that supported our editorial project.

### ***Why Participatory Research and Inquiry***

The phrase 'Participatory Research and Inquiry' (PR&I from here on) is meant to represent the broadest conceptual umbrella covering a variety of research and inquiry practices, methods and tools. Research is always about 'inquiry'. As an approach to learning, inquiry involves an exploration of the world by way of asking questions, discovering and testing answers in the search for new understanding. This is the familiar terrain of the participatory researcher.

Practitioners who may not view themselves as 'researchers' are also making very important contributions to the practice of participatory research through social interventions anchored in participatory commitments. While not necessarily aspiring to generate

public knowledge, they understand and value the reciprocal causality between inquiry, learning, efficacy and agentic social transformation. Not defined as 'formal research', nevertheless the participatory inquiry practices used follow rigorous and systematic procedures. Their aim is to construct spaces where groups can learn what they need in order to engage in collective problem solving within a participatory and often emancipatory ethos. We include a selection of this important work in the handbook because it contributes to the two goals articulated above.

Ultimately, we look at participatory research and inquiry in a very common-sense way. It involves *finding out about things, making sense of what we find out, and acting on that knowledge*. This book then, is about the ways in which people can gain knowledge and understanding of the issues that affect their lives and turn those into action to improve their lives.

In this handbook, we make an important distinction between participatory research more generally, and action-oriented research, which we treat as a subset of the wider field of participatory research. Participatory research includes all processes where evidence is gathered and analysed in a participatory way. It may or may not integrate action into the knowledge generation process as AR and PAR do. The latter are defined by an iterative (cyclical) relationship between action on the one hand, and evidence gathering and meaning making on the other (research). Here, action is rooted in what is being learned, and what is being learned is rooted in action.

Other forms of participatory research might engage participants extensively in identifying questions, collecting data and collectively analysing. These typically produce outputs that demonstrate the need for social change and/or influence others to act. While decoupling the research from the action, this approach can nevertheless be both participative and oriented towards action. Many of the examples in this book correspond to this model. This distinction also points to

the fact that, depending on their institutional location, some PR&I approaches may yield more action-oriented projects and products, and others more research-oriented ones, that is, some are more interventionist and others more academic, respectively (Ospina and Anderson, 2014).

### ***Linking Participation, Participatory Methods and Participatory Research Methods***

This handbook is about participatory research, not participation per se. There are many debates about the merits and challenges of different processes of democratic participation and movement building, from coproduction (see e.g. Ostrom, 1996; Pestoff, 2018), civic engagement (Skocpol and Fiorina, 2004; Verba, 1967), community participation (Mayo, 2000; Taylor, 2007) through to deliberative democracy and empowerment tradition (Dryzek et al., 2019; Elstub and Escobar, 2019; Fischer, 2003). The chapters in this handbook necessarily engage with these questions, since participatory research can be a central component of democratic processes and movements. However, what is distinct in this book is our concern with the relationship between research, inquiry and action.

Three interrelated but distinct constructs must therefore be differentiated when defining the nature of PR&I: participation, participatory methods and participatory research methods. This handbook is about the third construct, but it is conceptually embedded in the other two. PR&I is grounded in a firm belief about the value and benefits of participation; it also rests on a strong commitment to supporting participatory methods that help regular people – neighbours, immigrants, citizens, service recipients – to become active participants and perform significant roles in the processes and decisions affecting their lives, assertively confronting social exclusion and inequality.

We firmly believe in a concept of participation and participatory strategies that aim to engage social actors – particularly those who have been historically marginalized and excluded – so that they can fully understand, manage and control their own destiny. Fostering participation so people take control of their lives is an important aim by itself. But it is also the case that participants' knowledge is key to full understanding, and thus participatory methods enable participants to articulate their experience and knowledge of the situation or issue being addressed.

Embedded within the constructs of participation and participatory methods, PR&I goes one step further: it aims to bring the value and benefits of the participatory ethos and methods into the research and inquiry process. The goal is to inform and shape any systematic investigation not only to establish facts and reach new conclusions, but also to contribute towards change in the lives of those experiencing the situation being studied.

PR&I encompasses a myriad of research methodological approaches and techniques, with the goal of distributing the researcher role and the control over the research agenda and process among a larger group of stakeholders. Trained 'researchers' or 'facilitators' are part of a wider group of 'experts' that include those whose world or experience is being studied. The latter, in turn, become 'co-researchers and *knowing subjects*' rather than objects of the research (Bergold and Thomas, 2012: 7).

In the ideal PR&I paradigm, participants will be involved and engaged in every aspect of the research process, from initiating the inquiry and identifying the core questions, to determining the methods of data collection and the design of the process, to collecting and analysing data, to planning and taking action, to evaluating the impact of the action, and co-generating outputs for wider dissemination. In practice, different members of the research group may take different research roles and may engage at different moments of the process.

There is an important debate within the field, about what represents strong, that is, ‘meaningful’ participation within a participatory research project. Does it require full participation in all stages of the research process? Is initiating the inquiry a key prerequisite for meaningful participation? Is it absolutely necessary for participants to identify and ‘own’ the appropriate and critical research questions? Is there meaningful participation in the research if the analysis is not produced by participants themselves? Each practitioner of participatory research may have their own opinions and non-negotiables in answering these questions. Our view is that the most critical aspect of participatory research is that participants analyse their data and make meaning together. There are a few exceptions to this, which we highlight in this handbook. The first is when a highly technical analysis is required – for example a statistical analysis of data. Yet even here, while the technical analysis may need to be done by an external researcher, the analysis of its meaning and implications can and should be a participant analysis, for the research to qualify as meaningfully participatory. The second can be seen in the citizen inquiry example explored in Chapter 35. Here people join a community of inquirers to aggregate data from thousands of different sources. The analysis of these data is done centrally on behalf of the community.

We would also argue that a prerequisite for meaningful participation is that the actual distribution of tasks and activities, and thus the degree and depth of participation, must be negotiated among participants who view themselves, and are acknowledged as having equal say on the matter (Ospina et al., 2004). Equally important is the commitment to generate knowledge that can be shared with a wider, interested community of practice, and that is meant to be at the service of, or owned by social actors who want to transform their world.

Where we position ourselves with respect to these issues is not a trivial matter. Since

Arnstein’s (1969) ladder of participation (and before) it has been well known that participatory research processes may be vulnerable to co-option and manipulation, with the knowledge generated by participants being extracted for purposes that they know nothing about, and/or used to legitimize causes that they would never have agreed to, had they ever been asked. Many processes which are at best extensive consultations and at worst cynical manipulations are called participatory. The language of participation, like the language of all progressive change, can be co-opted in the interests of those who hold and seek to maintain power. But this is no reason to reject the idea or importance of participatory research. It means that we, as participatory researchers, must clarify the criteria that make it meaningful. And the nature of the answer is directly related to the researchers’ positionality and commitment to social transformation.

### ***Participatory Research and Transformative Change***

The focus in this handbook is on participatory research in the service of transformative change that brings about social justice. It is research that takes both a values stance and is explicitly for a purpose. It is rooted in the idea that knowledge grounded in experience and action has the potential to improve both human lives and the environment that we live in. Collective understanding – achieved through group meaning making, reflection, and learning based on experience and through group analysis and interpretation of data – is the foundation for collective action, and collective action is the heartbeat of transformative social change.

In this sense, what is ‘meaningful’ participation in the research process becomes clear when there is a commitment to transformative change for social justice. This brings an intrinsic emancipatory value to PR&I efforts in several ways, particularly in a context that

aims to strengthen and deepen a democratic project.

First, PR&I democratizes research (which is usually in the hands of a few in traditional research perspectives), creating spaces where more democratic relations are rehearsed at the micro level of interaction. Furthermore, the practices of participation, reflection, dialogue (and action) embedded in PR&I are central to building the requisite skills and fostering the values and attitudes required for democratic practice in everyday life, in the workplace, and in wider society.

Second, in engaging participants in a process that enhances social awareness, self-efficacy and agency, PR&I develops social change leadership capabilities that can be transformative for persons and groups, and skills that are transferable to participants' own spheres of influence. Leadership is here understood as what happens when a group is able to articulate a common purpose and its members find the direction they need to pursue it (Parés et al., 2017). This collective view of leadership (Ospina and Foldy, 2016) emphasizes the potential of members of a collective to become active agents of their own lives, to understand how they contribute to the change they want to see, and to be willing to cultivate the leadership of others, thus creating spaces that are 'leaderful', that is, full of leadership (Raelin, 2005).

Third, PR&I fosters shifts in power relations at either the micro level (e.g. across gender lines or among diverse participants); the meso level (e.g. between donors and NGOs, between programme designers and its recipients, or between researchers and researched); or at the macro level (e.g. between public officials and citizens or between the former and excluded communities). These shifts may contribute to produce a tangible impact in the social, economic and political conditions where participants live.

While we will take up this discussion again in Chapters 2 and 71, here we wanted to signal and anticipate its importance.

## A DIVERSE AND COMPLEX LANDSCAPE

The participatory research and inquiry domain featured in this handbook could be visualized as a dynamic landscape, a watershed with its many hydrographic basins whose rivers and their tributaries flow into the same sea. PR&I researchers and facilitators draw from varied traditions each with their own philosophical assumptions about the nature of the world (ontology), how we know it (epistemology) and how we can get to understand it (methodology) (Crotty, 1998).

Consider for example the simplest distinction between neo-positivist,<sup>1</sup> interpretivist and critical research paradigms and how it plays out in participatory research. The *neo-positivist paradigm* operates under assumptions of a science of verification, with the goal of producing evidence-based explanations. The *interpretivist paradigm* operates under assumptions of a science of understanding, with the goal of describing and interrogating context-dependent relational networks, practices and structures constructed through interaction. The *critical paradigm* operates under assumptions of a science of conceptualization, surfacing power dynamics grounded in a value-laden reality with the goal of challenging traditional understandings (Goldman, 2016; Sulkowski, 2013).

Most participatory researchers draw on interpretivist and critical paradigms that challenge core assumptions of the neo-positivist paradigm, particularly that the researcher must remain distant from the object of study, which suggests an approach to inquiry that 'captures' reality from the outside (Evered and Louis, 1981). Many contributors in the handbook define themselves as interpretive and/or critical researchers, espousing constructionist and constructivist perspectives that suggest an approach to inquiry that 'accesses' reality from the inside (Evered and Louis, 1981).

But some participatory researchers may decide to embed neo-positivist methods and techniques in their PR projects, for example to help establish evidence for base lines or to describe broad populations of interest. They may thus combine an instrumental use of neo-positivist methods, while drawing on interpretivist and critical assumptions to design the broader participatory research project, particularly if the research is action-oriented and has an emancipatory goal. Other PR researchers may intersect epistemologies by designing mixed methods research that explicitly include neo-positivist and interpretivist streams, as several contributors in the *Mixing and Mashing* section (subsection 4.6) of the handbook do.

To complicate matters, while sound research suggests the need of a good fit between the research's ontological stance and epistemological and methodological choices (Gaskell and Bauer, 2000), the practice of participatory research shows other possibilities. For example, research featured in various chapters of the handbook may share the same ontological posture of relationality, that is, giving primacy to relationships in the constitution of the self and experience (Gergen, 2009); but they may draw from different epistemological traditions including constructionism, pragmatism or constructivism, which hold distinct assumptions about how we know the world and how we can access it to better understand it and thus change it.

Yet others may start with similar epistemological commitments that, for example, acknowledge the tensions between professional expertise and grounded expertise; but they may draw from different social theories that shape and inform the way the research will unfold (e.g. neo-Marxism, feminism and intersectionality, neocolonial studies, critical theory, complexity and living systems theory, standpoint theory – grounded on identities like indigeneity – action science, social learning theory and so on). Each choice is anchored in specific theoretical commitments

and opens the door to new debates as well as new practices. Some bundles of methods and tools have been 'branded', as they have been developed over time in particular institutional contexts, and are then articulated, disseminated and transferred to other contexts (e.g. Reflect, Photovoice, Open Space, World Café, and so on). More broadly, there are some 'umbrella methodologies', which, while not branded, denote an important participatory approach, such as Participatory Action Research (PAR), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Cooperative Inquiry, Appreciative Inquiry and Systemic Action Research (SAR), among others.

Importantly, as mentioned earlier, a commitment to social change brings together the multifarious approaches to PR&I represented in the handbook. This was an explicit editorial choice. All featured chapters position the research and inquiry practices within a larger purpose: to change something in the social world – and within a broader aspiration to achieve some measure of social justice. This will be further developed as the issues and challenges of contemporary PR&I practices are unpacked in Chapter 2.

But despite this common commitment there are important differences about how these aspirations are conceived and implemented. Conceptions of what is social change and the aspirations to attain it vary, from a vision that contributes to create more inclusive and fair conditions by way of incremental deep changes in existing power relations and institutions; to an emancipatory vision, which aspires to change present power relations and the structures that support them, with the aim of contributing to create a new social order. These may not be mutually exclusive, and may share a social justice framing, but they do represent different transformational aims (Box, 2012). These differences, with their embedded theoretical assumptions, invite yet additional debates around nuances in the political framings surrounding a commitment to action-oriented and social justice grounded PR&I.

A connected distinction worth highlighting relates to the politics of research and knowledge, a topic that we will return to in depth in Chapter 71. Some participatory research projects may be radically pushing the boundaries of particular social interventions and institutional strategies by challenging core assumptions about change, power and knowledge in general; others may be attempting to introduce the radical assumptions of participatory research into particular domains, fields and disciplines where traditional research paradigms have dominated, for example in health and education, or in the discipline of economics.

This distinction also points to the importance of oppositionality as a trend of the field, reflected in the contributions to the handbook. For example, some participatory researchers have started to explore the concept of epistemic violences (see Chapter 13 and Chapter 71 for a deeper discussion), and are asking questions such as how to decolonize research, not just in traditional research but also within PR&I. Indeed, independent of their social change vision and their perspective within the politics of research, some members of the community have become critical of classical PR methods, and are creatively ‘deviating’ their practice, while remaining committed to a participatory ethos, thus innovating the ways of thinking and doing PR&I (see Chapter 28 for an example).

An important insight that emerged in the process of ‘curating’ the handbook was that of identifying parallel developments and innovations – albeit named with different terms and languages – happening independent from each other in the global North and the global South. For example, the principles behind the concept of ‘extended epistemology’ developed in the North (by Heron and Reason) have some resonance with principles underlying Indigenous worldviews, and concepts such as ‘dialogue of knowledges’ (*dialogo de saberes*) in the South (see Chapters 9, 13 and 28 for deeper reflections).

This is so, even though the latter emerges in part, as a strong critique of the ‘western’ dominance of traditional PAR, and as an alternative anchor for the practice of PR&I in Latin America.

Likewise, the increased interest and acknowledgement of emotions, the senses, the body and embodiment that characterize some contemporary practice in the global North (see for example Chapter 20) have important resonances with the relevance given to these dimensions in an approach to PR that emerged in the 1970s and has been gaining great currency in the contemporary global South, grounded on the triad ‘feel-body-thinking’ (*senti-cuerpo-pensante*) (see Chapter 29). Here we also see, of course, cross-fertilization based on the increased capacity of participatory researchers and practitioners to exchange ideas, learn from each other and collaborate across geographical regions.

The renewed importance of relationality in the global North (and its implications for the practice of research) could be enriched by the deep relational Indigenous worldview, as suggested in Chapters 9 and 28. This would counter the tensions typical of a neocolonial reality still dominating the world. In Chapter 9 New Zealand authors Cram and Adcock invite participatory researchers to consider the implications of an Indigenous research approach. They propose to use this approach to rethink the practice of PR&I in other contexts and in solidarity with the aspirations for sovereignty of Indigenous peoples, and its rootedness in the land. We see much opportunity for innovation and expansion of the boundaries of PR&I by way of this critical engagement among scholars and practitioners who come from different social worlds, geopolitical locations and theoretical perspectives. We have tried to encourage it in this handbook, by ensuring geographical and social representation as well as supporting contributions from the broadest possible spectrum of PR&I practitioners.



## THE HANDBOOK'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Our aspiration – that this handbook would articulate the state of the art in PR&I, covering both established approaches as well as new cutting-edge methods and debates – has been realized. With some humility we recognize that we do not cover every possible theme, tradition, method, tool or technique of this lush river that nurtures the rich landscape of PR&I. While we have tried to be as comprehensive as possible, for different reasons – including our own blind spots as well as having lost some chapters along the way – we consider this to be a valuable, but incomplete handbook. We will come back to this point at the end of this section, after offering a description of what is present in the handbook.

### ***Handbook Logic, Structure and Contents***

The handbook consists of five sections (and subsections), distributed across two volumes. Most of the first volume leans towards the conceptual and ethical, while most of the second leans towards the methodological dimensions of PR&I. Volume 1 comprises Section 1, *Introduction*, Section 2, *Key Influences and Foundations of PR&I*, and Section 3, *Critical Issues in the Practice of PR&I*, which is cross-cut by the themes of ethics, inclusion and power. These sections enable the reader to situate the methods chapters featured in Section 4 in their intellectual contexts; and relate them to relevant debates and challenges. The reader interested in a particular method can refer back to these sections to get a deeper understanding of how the ideas in the methods chapter they chose connect to the larger landscape: what was the evolution of the described experiences and practices, where did they come from? What do they mean in that larger context of PR&I? How do they speak to the issues and challenges that define today's conversations

among participatory research and inquiry practitioners? How do they connect to important general ideas such as what it means to work with vulnerable populations or to address ethical issues?

We asked contributors in Sections 2 and 3 to include in their chapters, albeit not in this particular order, a history of the ideas and concepts and how they have evolved over time; seminal pieces of work that readers should know about; a clear exposition of what characterizes particular approaches to participatory research – how and why they are different from others, as well as key considerations, critiques and gaps, and how these have been addressed. We also asked them to signal to the reader where the cutting-edge thinking now lies and its implications (main contributions) for contemporary participatory research.

Section 4 of the Handbook, *Methods and Tools*, starts in Volume 1 and continues in Volume 2. It consists of all the chapters that feature specific methods, tools and techniques of PR&I. All chapters are organized in a similar fashion: they present the conceptual groundings of the featured method, and describe step-by-step how it can be implemented by way of a particular case that exemplifies the decisions made – from design to implementation. We asked contributors to frame and structure their chapter according to their own understanding of relevance and creativity. But we also requested the inclusion of a conceptual framing and a case study exemplar of a practical application, including a discussion of the impact of the case. We asked for a clear exposition of its research design and a substantive methodological 'how to' section describing if possible steps (with an understanding that there are no formulas). Finally, we requested a discussion of dilemmas, issues, debates, ethics, challenges that were encountered when using the featured method in the particular case.

Section 4, *Methods and Tools*, features 45 chapters (including section introductions), categorized in six subsections offering

examples of the range of methods that reflect the best of the PR&I community of practice. The subsections are organized by specific themes, as described below. In terms of their order, we positioned first, in Volume 1, chapters in two subsections featuring core themes and assumptions that are common across most of the chapters: the relevance of dialogue in participatory research (subsection 4.1, *Dialogic and Deliberative Processes*) and the promise of digital technologies for its practice in the 21st century (subsection 4.2, *Digital Technologies in Participatory Research*). The relevance of these core themes is evidenced by the challenges and limitations that COVID-19 has imposed on face-to-face dialogue and on physical human interaction when bio-security measures are at stake during research.

The other chapters of Section 4 appear in Volume 2, organized in four additional subsections: *Action-Oriented Forms of Participatory Research* (subsection 4.3), *Visual and Performative Methods* (subsection 4.4), *Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)* (subsection 4.5) and *Mixing and Mashing Participatory and Formal Research Methods* (subsection 4.6). Finally, Section 5 offers *Final Reflections* and closes the handbook.

For a specific description of chapters in each section and subsections, we direct the reader's attention to the excellent introductions that section editors wrote as the opening chapter to the section they curated. These offer broad conceptual frames that hold together the featured chapters and explain how these fit in the broader section's gestalt. Some section editors chose to write a short synthesis of the importance of the overarching category, briefly introducing the chapters and linking them; others additionally engaged in deeper explorations and reflections on the theme of the section.

These introductions themselves represent important contributions that weave together the sections and subsections, thus helping the reader better understand this varied, diverse and contested landscape of PR&I.

This handbook would not have been possible without the commitment and generosity of these section editors. We are thankful to them not only for helping to frame the sections, but also for inviting contributors, conceptualizing the issues for the reader, and coordinating the intense and disciplined work that resulted in the final high-quality products we offer to the reader in the handbook. Guiding the contributors and giving them feedback, finding reviewers for each contribution, in some cases coordinating peer reviewing between contributors in their section (and often acting as peer reviewers for other chapters of the handbook) demanded lots of their time, energy and commitment.

We end this section with a note about the peer review process we designed to ensure the high quality of the contributions. We acknowledge and are grateful for the excellent work of the reviewers, whose names are given with great appreciation in the section that precedes this chapter. Each chapter underwent a formal peer review, in addition to the ones offered by the section and handbook editors. Following the spirit of collegiality and of the participatory research ethos, we labelled the review 'friendly'; this was meant to signal to both authors and reviewers that the aim was to generate constructive feedback to enhance the quality of the chapter, while supporting the authors' successful completion of their contribution. We also shared with reviewers the list of quality criteria and other instructions given to contributors when they were invited to write their chapter (as described earlier in this chapter).

Likewise, inviting transparency, we proposed that paired authors and reviewers would know who they were; this did not preclude identifying gaps and contradictions, or challenging ideas, but the instruction was to do so in a relational and developmental manner. We gave the reviewers the choice of anonymity, but all accepted the invitation of disclosure and in fact, some engaged in further dialogue with the authors around their feedback.

### ***Some Reflections on the Final Product***

The structure we chose to organize the handbook has its own internal logic, and at the same time it is grounded in ‘subjective’ and ‘inter-subjective’ choices made by us as handbook editors, with the input and support of section editors. This has benefits and drawbacks. As a benefit, the reader will note that some chapters could fit in several of the various sections, and through careful curation we have placed them where we thought the chapter would best complement a given section and/or the overall logic of each volume. For example, the Mixing and Mashing subsection (4.6) includes research applications that could fit in other sections too. But locating them there calls the reader’s attention to specific creative ways to mix different methodologies; or to convert traditional methods like network analysis or statistics into participatory methods like Participatory Network Analysis or Participatory Statistics. It will also become obvious that other mixes and mashes are described in chapters located in other sections emphasizing different themes.

This last point suggests some drawbacks as well as opportunities. On the positive side, we are confident that the sections provide a coherent and curated perspective on a particular area or specialized theme within the PR&I family of methods. For example, the visual and performative subsection (4.4) focuses explicitly on examples where these methods were used to drive the full research process. The description of activities of the same type within a participatory or qualitative research process may also appear in chapters in other sections, where the focus and application of the method has a different emphasis. Furthermore, other chapters, like the cooperative inquiry contribution (Chapter 31 in subsection 4.1 on Dialogue) or the contribution about violence on men who have sex with men in Viet Nam (Chapter 66 in the Mixing and Mashing subsection) also

describe visual and performative methods, but their location is intended to highlight dialogue in the first case and the combination of methodologies in the second. Similarly, a chapter in a specific section could have also been considered as an exemplar for another section; for example, Retolaza Eguren’s Chapter 42 on Memorialab as a dialogic action-oriented approach to social healing in the Basque Country (in subsection 4.3 on Action-Oriented Forms of Participatory Research), could usefully also illustrate the role of dialogue in PR&I (in subsection 4.1, Dialogic and Deliberative Processes).

Likewise, many contributors to chapters in Section 4 mention directly the influence of specific PR traditions and pioneers of PR&I practice. But given space limitations, and to avoid redundancies, we asked them not to go into the details; the depth behind such comments can be found – elaborated with great detail – in Section 2, which features the foundations and influences that have shaped the theory and practice of PR&I. Finally, the reader will find some common themes or ideas that appear with different degrees of emphasis but are recurrent throughout the handbook, as well as emerging themes that continue to gain currency. These recurrent and emergent themes represent threads that weave through the handbook, and reflect the basic scaffolding that holds together a diverse, contested and innovative landscape. We identify and reflect on these themes in the final chapter (71) of the handbook.

We end by returning to acknowledge some relevant absences and gaps in our handbook. While we made an effort and were able to maintain some balance among contributors – in terms of geography, topics and social identities, for example – the final result was in part a product of our own limitations around time and access to an extensive, but finite network of participatory research practitioners. There were many more contributions we would have liked to see; some issues we would have liked to have deepened with more than one chapter, but space limitations made

this difficult. There are some errors of omission on our part and others due to missing chapters we commissioned that for various reasons were never completed. Nevertheless, we are delighted by the range of handbook contributors and the high quality of their contributions.

## CLOSING REMARKS

A long tradition of research, practice and writing has built up the field of participatory research and inquiry, and we stand on the shoulders of those foundations. These developed in parallel and via exchanges across the world, for example among Orlando Fals Borda from Colombia, who coined the term Participatory Action Research in the early 1970s, and his colleague and friend Budd Hall in the UK, who used the term participatory research in an article in 1975. Hall, in turn, was a long-time friend and collaborator with Rajesh Tandon from India, who set up PRIA (Participatory Research in Asia). Likewise, the field continues to be inspired by the pedagogical work of Paulo Freire and the performative innovations of Augusto Boal, both from Brazil.

More recently, the important feminist thinking on participation, inclusion and power of Pat McGuire and Andrea Cornwall in the UK, and the work of action researchers such as Mary Brydon-Miller, Davydd Greenwood and Hilary Bradbury in the United States, and Peter Reason and Judy Marshall in the UK, among so many others, have laid important foundations. Others have made contributions in key sectors such as the UK scholars Robert Chambers in international development and Stephen Kemmis in education; the US scholar Chris Argyris in management and organizational studies and Canadian Jane Springett in participatory health research. Still others – such as Bob Dick and Yoland Wadsworth from Australia, who have produced outstanding work respectively on

participatory facilitation and systemic participatory work; and John Gaventa in the UK, who substantively developed theories of power linked to participation and participatory research – are important to mention. There are so many more.

To these figures, we add robust global networks as well as the rise and fall of key research centres whose members have provided a critical mass of participatory research and inquiry, building up bodies of learning for their communities and for the generations that have followed. Among these networks are the Action Learning, Action Research Association (ALARA) and the Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN). Key centres include the Highlander Centre, United States; COADY, Canada; CINEP<sup>2</sup> and UROSARIO Intercultural,<sup>3</sup> among others in Colombia; the DPDGT<sup>4</sup> in Peru; PRIA and Praxis, in India; ActionAid, which embedded the Reflect methodology into their practice across the world; and in the UK, the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice at the University of Bath, the SOLAR Centre (Social and Organizational Learning as Action Research) at the University of the West of England, the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action at the University of Durham, and the Participation, Inclusion and Social Change Team at the Institute of Development Studies. Suffice to say that the cutting-edge work in our handbook rests on the foundations that these and others have built. And there is today a critical mass that continues to carry on the work. With this growth come new challenges, which we will discuss in the next chapter (Chapter 2) and in our final remarks of Chapter 71.

Given this critical mass, we conclude this introduction with a reflection worth pondering. The emancipatory vocation of PR&I affords its scholars and practitioners an opportunity to enact collective leadership in two ways. First, by positioning participatory research as a viable research alternative that can make important contributions to knowledge and praxis within and outside

academia; and second, by continuing to challenge and confront the inequality and exclusion affecting large populations around the world through their research practice. In a sense, the convened contributors in this handbook illustrate an existing social change community of practice, one that has already made (and will continue to make) a relevant contribution to society with the praxis of its members and the knowledge legacy that they have been producing. Swimming against the mainstream currents, both in academia and in spaces of social intervention (e.g. in contexts of development at the national, neighbourhood and/or community levels), through their leadership, they can continue to create impact in the world. The excellent chapters ahead offer inspiration and courage to pursue and grow this leadership.

## Notes

- 1 We choose to use the term neo-positivism to refer to the most contemporary incarnation of positivism, one that is more sophisticated and temperate in its basic assumptions about the nature of reality and research, for example acknowledging the idea of reciprocal causation. Others may refer to this contemporary version as post-positivism. In any event, the core basic positivist assumptions about the nature of the world, how it can be known and the implications for doing research remain firm.
- 2 CINEP stands for Center for Research and Popular Education (Spanish acronym).
- 3 The Intercultural School of Indigenous Diplomacy of Universidad del Rosario.
- 4 DPDGT stands for Democracy and Global Transformation Program (Spanish acronym).

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